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Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the special session of the General Assembly entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century": implementation of strategic objectives and action in the critical areas of concern and further action and initiatives: women's equal participation in conflict prevention, management and conflict resolution and in post-conflict peace-building

Statement submitted by Hadassah (Women's Zionist Organization of America), a non-governmental organization in special consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31 of 25 July 1996.

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* E/CN.6/2004/1.

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I. Background: Hadassah, the Women's Zionist Organization of America and the Community School for Women

Founded in 1912 as a women's organization dedicated to improving health conditions in Palestine, Hadassah, the Women's Zionist Organization of America, now supports and administers a vast network of humanitarian activities all over the world, but primarily in the conflict-stricken State of Israel. Committed to promoting human rights, women's rights and peace among nations, Hadassah's projects in Israel – encompassing hospitals, nursing and medical schools, children's centres and educational institutions—serve the people of the region regardless of race or religion. They are examples of co-existence between Arabs and Jews and, in this way, are examples of conflict resolution and post-conflict peace building.

As an NGO with special consultative status with ECOSOC, Hadassah has been working to meet the global objectives set by the sessions of the Commission on the Status of Women, including the Beijing Platform for Action, the Windhoek Declaration of May 2001 and the 48th Session's theme, "Women's equal participation in conflict prevention, management and conflict resolution and in post-conflict peace building".

One such example is Hadassah Foundation's support for the Community School for Women in Israel. Established at the start of the second Intifada in 2000, the Community School is a school without walls for low-income Arab and Jewish women offering courses in gender studies as well as training for economic empowerment in communities throughout Israel. The ultimate goal of the Community School is to reach out to women in Israel's socio-economic periphery to establish nuclei of women with feminist consciousness which will go on to become the core of a women's movement in their region.

The Community School has so far created a successful model of cooperation and collaboration between Palestinian Arab and Jewish Israelis. The Community School is run by two co-directors -- Ilana Sugbeker-Masekah, an Israeli Jew of Mizrahi origin (Eastern Jews), and Areen Hawari, a Palestinian Arab Israeli. Both directors bring to their work at the Community School deep experience working in collaboration and co-existence frameworks.

The Community School's multicultural feminist commitment is further reflected in its board which equally represents Palestinian Arab, Mizrahi Jewish and Ashkenazi Jewish women. The board works on a consensus model of decision making. In addition, the School's faculty represents these three communities. In this way, the School is a model of a successful multicultural social justice organization. At this time of intense conflict between Jews and Palestinians, this is no small achievement.

II. Methodology and Curriculum

(A) Pragmatic Skills: information technology, computer training and English language courses:

As defined in the Windhoek Declaration of May 2001, information "is a fundamental right, public property, and at the service of humanity." Recognizing the centrality of information to women's empowerment, the Community School offers a curriculum for expanding economic opportunity through information technology, computer training and English language courses.

(B) Coursework:

Reflecting the Community School's commitment to equally serve Arab and Jewish communities, all textual materials are published in Arabic and Hebrew. The texts used also reflect authors from different national and ethnic backgrounds.

Typically, the Community School offers 15-20 courses per year to an average of 12-15 students per class. Each course is 10-12 weeks duration, meeting once a week for 2-3 hours. Courses include topics on "Women, Femininity, and Feminism," "Women, the Body, and Health;" Women, War and Peace;" "Women and Sexuality," and "Creative Feminist Strategies for Conflict Resolution."

(C) Participants:

The Community School serves a broad range of Arab and Jewish women, from Mizrahi women prisoners and Bedouin Arab women in Israel's desert region, to Ashkenazi Jewish communities in poorer urban areas and the peripheral, smaller towns of Israel.

III. Future Goals

The Community School is currently seeking funding to implement a three-year project that will further aim to decrease the polarization of Israeli Jews and Palestinian Arabs and simultaneously empower women in their communities.

The pilot project will include the following components:

- In the first year, students will learn practical skills in computer use and will learn about the historic discrimination to which that they have been subjected based on gender, class, ethnicity and nationality. Jewish and Arab groups will be brought

together to advance their understanding of women in society with a course in "Women, War, and Peace." This course will specifically address the historic and contemporary tensions between Palestinian Arab and Jewish women in Israel and how they both must contend with the contemporary conflict. Also in the first year, the students will do field work to learn how other feminist/social-change organizations operate.

- In the second year, Jewish and Arab participants will jointly study courses that provide the skills necessary to advance a social-change agenda. In addition, they will meet to explore Palestinian Arab/Jewish collaboration on a project in their region that will advance the status of women and bring communities in conflict together for mutual advantage.

- In year three, participants will begin implementation of the project with the guidance of facilitators and consultants provided by the Community School. They will be provided with whatever supplemental education and training is required, such as spoken English, conflict resolution skills, and consensus decision-making.